

Female Figures

Beatrice is the central figure in Dante's "The Divine Comedy". Beatrice (Italian) – favoring with beatitude. The semantics of this female character traces back to semantics of Donna in dolce stil nuovo and in courteous lyrics. Dante's poetic style constitutes Beatrice's character as embodiment of supreme beauty and femininity that are, in their turn, the basis of beauty in other female characters. Dante perceives Beatrice's beauty as beauty in its substantial expression. He states that it is difficult find out where Beatrice

14 was greater in her goodness or her beauty

15 on high Olympus is in triumph... (Purgatorio 24)

Her beauty is able to refresh the nature of people who feast their eyes upon Beatrice, because her beauty is 'holy' and lovely. No wonder that Dante interprets Beatrice's character in courteous paradigm like an impulse to divine ascent, axiologically equivalent to revelation. It is also described in color symbolism of Dante's comedy: during the third, final encounter, Beatrice is dressed in white veil, green cape and shining fiery red clothes:

32 a white veil, she was crowned with olive boughs

33 her cape was green; her dress beneath, flame-red (Purgatorio 18)

In the context of Christian color symbolism, originating from Neo-Platonism, the color means wisdom, Divine glory and a high degree of perfection. The semantics of love in the context of The Divine Comedy is constituted like the semantics of purification, ablution and approaching Absolute.

As far as The Divine Comedy is the poet's confession, Beatrice's character leads Dante through the entire story. Virgil accompanies Dante and arrives with him to purgatory. Further Beatrice replaces Virgil as personification of religious contemplation. Dante consistently calls her "holy":

58 ... the holy smile that lit

59 the holy face of Beatrice (Paradiso 23)

Beatrice shows Dante the way to heavens, and to divine contemplation. The Divine Comedy was written under the influence of clerical, Provençal and courteous literature, the sweet, delightful new style. Love, that infringes the poet's world view, is based on love to Beatrice.

After the purgatory Dante, free of sins, arrives to paradise. After the poet recants his sins, he feels peace and justice in his heart. The mountain can be perceived as 'coming back to Eden', finding the paradise lost. Beatrice's appearance is culmination of the entire Dante's travel. Moreover, the poet draws an analogy with Christ's apparition in the history, in soul and at the end of all times, and the appearance of Beatrice symbolically means expiation and perfection.

A story of tragic love between Dido and Aeneas is described in Virgil's *The Aeneid*. This female character is a personification of sacrifice. Dido didn't want falling in love with Aeneas, but because of Cupid's arrow, she couldn't avoid love. The queen, who was beyond all 'earthy' feelings, who had a masculine strength and brave character, falls in love with all possible passion. She is ready to speak about the 'Trojan guest', about his actions, his worth, his majestic air, brave attempts for falling Troy, the way he looks and the grace he speaks with (Virgil, Chapter 4). Dido is displayed in all her helplessness concerning the 'fatal love'.

Love is integral and unique by its nature. Dido's love is not a fortune or short passing episode. It is the art that demands self-perfection, selflessness, ability to commit a heroic deed and ability to sacrifice. Dido shows that the main principle of love is to sacrifice. Her love is destructive: Dido cannot resist from loving Aeneas, and when he leaves Dido, she feels absolutely miserable and, being unable to live without her love, she kills herself. Dido's character exposes the nature of women's sacrificial love.

In contrast to other female characters, Dido is earthier. Her character embodies all-embracing, in-depth, and all-absorbing love. Her love is love of two adults, the desire of unity with beloved Aeneas. Dido's character is exceptional by its nature. It exists not only in organic unity with other characters, but as relatively independent desire, intention and display of feelings. Passion ruins Dido's heart, it destroys her and affects deeper than amorousness. It is passion with no reason that enters the secret corners of Dido's soul, and fills her completely. No wonder that at the end of the story Dido cannot survive living apart from Aeneas and kills herself in a burst of all-absorbing and omnivorous destructive and desperate hopelessness.

Saint Augustine in his 'Confessions' describes one of the strongest and most prominent female figures. Monica, Augustine's mother, is an energetic, careful and provident mother. In case Dido is synonymous to sacrificial love, Beatrice is synonymous to perfection and divinity, Monica symbolizes maternity. Augustine writes about Monica's maternal virtues like obedience, patience, selfless service of other people, piety, mildness, kindness, and temperance. Monica is a perfect mother, although in her love to Augustine she is selfish.

Saint Augustine describes her, attaching Monica the importance of the first woman Eve. Her character embodies faith and the Church in her devotion to God. According to him, Augustine solicited with agitation and faith from the piety of his mother and the piety of the Church (which is the mother of us all) (Book 1, n.p.). Augustine even draws a certain parallel with the Church, belittling no mother's services.

Monica's character equals to her attitude to son. She shows concern for her son, she takes troubles about him. Monica tries to do all her best to make his life easier. She, being selfish in her maternal blind love, tries to struggle with God. Monica has other intentions concerning Augustine. She plans him to marry, to live a good life with wife, children, family

happiness and steady private life.

When we read Augustine's Confessions and his phrases about his mother's concerns, we believe in her love, because maternal love is active interest in life and development of a beloved person. Another aspect of Monica's character is responsibility. It implies the response for revealed or hidden necessities of her son. To be responsible means to be able and to be ready to 'response'.

Augustine describes Monica's figure like a connecting-link of human soul, the basis of all kinds of love able to be placed there. Augustine allows us reading between lines when he speaks about its compound structure and interrelations between all verges of human conscience. It was Monica, who inspired him love to God, and who predetermined all his future existence.

Female characters, examined in this paper, are important not only because in and of themselves, but also because they had great impact of prototypes of literary female characters of the posterior epochs. Female features like devotedness, maternal love, purity, perfection, embodiment of love and defenselessness, innocence and selflessness, ability to sacrifice and desire of love, - all these qualities were reproduced over and over again by infinite number of poets and writers.

Female figures are central and decisive. All of them appear as guides along the way (i.e. Dido in The Aeneid) and can be explored as symbols of eternal womanhood. Peculiarity of femininity among other substantial world origins is in its aesthetic characters. Female figure is, first of all, the beauty, devotion, the source and goal of all supreme feelings and emotional experiences in the literature and beyond it. Hence, literature and art are marked by femininity, and female figures and characters play a pivotal role for writers and poets.

Bibliography

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